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MANAGEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

U. S. Department of Agriculture

A summary of significant events of
interest to USDA management

Issue #64
June 27, 1977

AWARD FOR FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION.....Senator Proxmire announced that instead of his "Fleece of the Month" award for June, he was giving a special "Award of Merit" to three government agencies: the Smithsonian Institution, the National Science Foundation and FmHA for specific examples of "wise, economical, effective and constructive use of taxpayer's money."

Senator Proxmire is Chairman of the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee and a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee which has jurisdiction over the public funds Congress appropriates to government agencies. His comments relating to FmHA were as follows:

"In its own way the Farmers Home Administration has done a remarkable job in increasing the productivity of its programs. In the period 1972-1976 the FmHA had a 32 percent increase in the weighted total of the loans and grants it made and serviced, while it had a 3 percent reduction in the number of persons (employee years) doing the job. Some 265 fewer persons (employee years) serviced over 2,800 additional farm ownership and operating loans, low income housing loans, and community loans for watershed and sewers among the 19 major programs included in their productivity index.

This was done under a government-wide productivity program sponsored by the General Accounting Office. The program is designed to provide the government with the same kind of measurement system for productivity which is widely used in the private sector. As many aspects of government programs can be automated--sending out social security or Veterans Administration checks, for example--tens of millions of dollars can be saved by the use of capital equipment, making procedures more routine and providing a measurement system for government processes."

EVALUATION OF PIP.....Participants in the Personnel Interchange Process (PIP) generally responded favorably to the program according to results of a recent end-of-year program evaluation. Most felt that assignment objectives were clearly explained prior to entering the assignment; assignments were in line with career objectives; assignments were helpful in preparing them for higher level responsibility; and the length of the assignments was appropriate. Most participants felt that PIP helps promote a better understanding of the Department-wide management process. Several participants indicated that OP needs to create a better understanding of the program and that PIP needs higher visibility. (Contact: John Kizler, OP, ext. 76977)

TELPAC TARIFF TO BE CONTINUED.....On October 1, 1976, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruled that American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) could no longer offer the reduced TELPAK tariff which enables large volume users of telecommunications to lease channels in pre-set packages of 60 and 240 at reduced rates--approximately \$.50 per mile versus \$2.00 per mile. The discontinuance of TELPAK would increase the Government's cost of leasing circuitry from commercial carriers from \$400 million to \$470 or \$480 million. Based on USDA's 6.8% pro rata share of the FTS billing, Agriculture agencies would have to increase their budgets by \$4 or \$5 million. However, on June 2, the FCC revoked its earlier ruling because of uncertainty that the TELPAK tariff was actually discriminatory. It is anticipated that GSA will retract its announcement of April 8 that FTS costs would increase because of the TELPAK issue. The agencies will be notified when this happens. (Contact: Paul Denett, 00, ext. 75225)

NEW CENTRALIZED BLANKET PURCHASE ARRANGEMENT CONCEPT APPROVED.....The Office of Operations conducted a Blanket Purchase Arrangement (BPA) conference on June 17, with representatives from the agencies and NFC. The purpose of the conference was to examine the feasibility of the latest proposal for an automated and centralized BPA System. All of the agencies agreed that this basis concept was adaptable to differences in their current systems and the NFC will proceed with design and development of this BPA System. Agencies will be provided an opportunity to review and submit recommendations on the completed system package. (Contact: Lacy Arnold, 00, ext. 77527)

FCIC FUNCTION BEING MOVED TO KANSAS CITY.....FCIC will relocate approximately 25 people from the South Building to Kansas City about July 1. Although a survey group of 10-15 people will move into the vacated space, a net of 1,500-2,000 square feet will be available for reassignment; possibly to FSQS. (Contact: Al Cauley, 00, ext. 72815)

AUTOMATED PERSONNEL PROCESSING STATUS INFORMATION SYSTEM.....At a recent Management Council meeting, mention was made of an automated system under development in the Northeastern Region of ARS to provide progress and status information on the processing of personnel actions. This system is currently undergoing debugging, utilizing test data, with the expectation of introducing live data into the system during the month of July. Current plans are to make a presentation of the system to the Management Council in September. (Contact: Gail F. Sedgwick, ARS, ext. 73801)

EEO POSTER.....The June 13 issue of the Newsletter stated that the cost of the posters would be paid by agencies. This has been changed and the full cost will be picked up by OEO. The posters will be available through Central Supply on June 29.

FLEXITIME IN ERS.....A six month trial of flexitime was initiated on January 31. In April, a questionnaire was sent to all Washington employees. The following data is based on 652 responses.

In response to "Should the experiment be continued?":

- 85 percent of all employees like flexitime; only 6 percent dislike it.
- 76 percent of managers and 88 percent of first line supervisors like flexitime. Only 11 percent and 6 percent, respectively, dislike it.
- 62 percent of all employees are more satisfied with their job; only 3 percent are less satisfied.
- 39 percent of all employees believe their productivity has increased; only 1 percent feel their productivity has declined.
- 34 percent of managers feel their unit's productivity has increased; only 7 percent feel it has declined.
- 37 percent of all employees feel abuse of working hours has declined; only 4 percent feel it has increased.
- 46 percent of managers and 42 percent of first line supervisors feel abuse of working hours has declined; only 9 percent and 4 percent, respectively, feel that abuse of working hours increased.
- 36 percent of employees feel they have used less annual leave and 29 percent feel they have used less sick leave than they would have without flexitime.
- 82 percent of all employees feel that flexitime is of some importance when they consider working for another organization.
- Only 10 percent of employees experienced some problem with getting work done because an employee they work with was not present because of flexitime.

In response to "What, if any, changes should be made in the flexitime plan?":

- Only 11 percent of employees found the sign-in/sign-out system highly objectionable; 28 percent thought it was an inconvenience. Sixty-one percent either liked it or were neutral.
- 51 percent of T&A clerks thought the sign-in/sign-out system made their job easier, only 6 percent said it made their job harder.
- 39 percent of employees felt abuse of working hours would increase if the sign-in/sign-out system were eliminated; 54 percent of the managers thought it would increase.
- 63 percent of employees had as their first or second choice the flexitime model that would permit some daily adjustments; the same percent of managers had this model as first or second choice.
- 94 percent of employees said the 6 hour core time was long enough for them to effectively perform their functions; 86 percent of the managers felt the core time was long enough.
- 84 percent of managers indicated that never or rarely do they need to call meetings outside the core hours; for supervisors the figure is 94 percent.

Another survey will be conducted in September and a final decision on adopting flexitime on a permanent basis will be made by October 1.
(Contact: Allan Johnson, ERS, ext. 78006)

BUDGET AND EMPLOYMENT CEILINGS.....

- ...Zero Based Budgeting - Decision units for use in preparation of the Fiscal Year 1977 ZBB estimates have been provided by the Secretary and OMB. Each Assistant Secretary is providing approved lists of these decision units, and program guidance, to agencies for use in the preparation of agency estimates. It is vitally important that all agencies submit their agency estimates no later than the July 15 due date in order for Departmental officials to give thorough consideration to the agency's request.
- ...Employment Ceilings - The President issued reduced employment ceilings for the Department for September 30, 1977, and 1978. Agencies will be advised of the new ceilings as soon as they have been reviewed and approved.
- ...Agriculture Appropriations Bill - The Senate Appropriations Committee has reported the 1978 Agriculture and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. The report recommends \$12,248,935,000 which is \$117,115,000 less than the Bill passed by the House on June 21 and \$375,728,000 less than the President's Budget estimates for 1978. Senate action on the Bill is expected to be completed prior to the congressional recess for the 4th of July holiday.

Both the House and Senate have passed the 1978 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. Conference action should be completed on this bill before recess. (Contact: Bob Sherman, OBPE, ext. 76176)

LEGISLATIVE REPORTING.....

- ...1978 Legislative Programs - A memorandum requesting agencies to submit their proposals for the 1978 legislative program has been issued by OBPE. The target date for agency submissions is July 15.
- ...FGIS Administrator - The nomination of Leland E. Bartelt to be Administrator of FGIS was received by the Senate on June 9.
- ...Health Benefits - On June 20, the House passed HR 2931 which would establish uniformity in Federal employee health benefits by preempting State or local laws affecting those benefits and coverage.
(Contact: John Mottershead, OBPE, ext. 74654)